Marissa Reif

Oral History Interview

**Full Name:** Olga Picarella

**Birthday:** July 7, 1932 (80 yrs old)

**Where were you parents from?**

My parents immigrated from the Abruzzo section of Italy and from the town of Vasto.

**When did they come to the United States?**

My mother arrived in America on July 4, 1920 and my father arrived later in 1921.

**How old were your parents when they had your brother, Aunt Gilda, and you?**

Their first born, Oreste, arrived when Mom was 20 and Dad 25. Mom was 24 and Dad, 29 when Gilda came. And they were 29 and 34 respectively when I was born.

**How old was your brother when he passed? What was the reason?**

Oreste was 5 years of age when he passed away. The reason was heart failure, which in today’s times, he would have survived.

**What did your father do for a living? Did you mother work outside of the home?**

He was an insurance agent for the Prudential Insurance Company of America. Mom never worked outside of the home, but she was a strong and dedicated home-maker.

**Do you remember the price of milk/butter/bread growing up?**

Not exactly, but I loved chocolate Tasty-Cakes and I remember they were .05 cents for a package of three! I also remember the price going up to .07 cents!

**What age were you when you met Pop-Pop?**

I was 19 when I met your Pop-Pop.

**How old were you when you married?**

I was two months shy of 21 years old.

**Can you describe your wedding?**

It was a great wedding- so they tell me! I guess I was so nervous that it’s almost a blur. I vividly remember my husband’s happiness.

**Did you go on a honeymoon? To where?**

Our honeymoon was in Miami Beach, Florida. We were scheduled there for two weeks, but after one week, I decided we should leave. Stupid? You bet!

**What military service was Pop-Pop in? How long did he serve? What did you do while he was away?**

Your Pop-Pop enlisted in the Navy in 1948- before my time. He had already served three years of his enlistment when I met him, and he had one more year to go. While he was away, I was working and we wrote to each other regularly. Since he was stationed in Norfolk, Virginia, he was able to come home on weekends whenever he had shore leave.

**What memories do you have of war years?**

Well, Pearl Harbor happened in December 1941 when I was just 9 years old. We were really young and naïve then. Children were really sheltered, so I can’t recall too much. I do recall that some items were rationed, such as sugar and cigarettes. But I mostly remember after the war was over. People were celebrating and cheering in the streets. My father drove us around the neighborhood, tooting the horn, just like everyone else.

**Do you remember hearing FDR’s speech for declaration of war? Do you remember his death?**

At that time, since the only means of communication was the radio, newspapers, and movie newsreels in the theaters, I do remember FDR saying that Pearl Harbor was a day that would live in infamy. And of course, war was declared. I remember his death in April, 1945, just before the end of World War II.

**Do you remember hearing about Hiroshima?**

Not really.

**Do you remember hearing about the German concentration camps?**

Again, not really. At that time, I really didn’t know about these catastrophes. It’s only in my much later years did I realize these tragedies.

**Who were the candidates in the first election you voted in?**

While I was growing up the voting age was 21, so I missed out on the Presidential election of that year. I could only vote for Governor and Mayor. So, my first presidential election I voted was candidates Kennedy and Nixon.

**What was your favorite place to visit as a child?**

I loved the ocean and the beach, but we didn’t go often. Believe it or not, I loved my cousin Antoinette, and I was so happy to visit with her.

**Where did you go to school?**

I went to Stephen Girard Elementary School from kindergarten to 6th grade. I went to Vare Junior High School from 7th to 9th grade. I also went to South Philadelphia High School for Girls from 10th to 12th grades.

**Did you walk to school? How far?**

All of these schools were close to home and I walked to all of them.

**What church did you belong to?**

I belonged to St. Monica’s Catholic Church in South Philadelphia at 17th and Ritner Streets.

**Where did you go to shop for food and clothes? Were item rationed?**

There were lots and lots of food and clothing stores in the neighborhood, so that’s where we shopped. On occasion, my mom would take us to Lit Brothers “up-town” on Market Street. As I mentioned earlier, some items were rationed during the war years.

**Where did you go for fun/recreation?**

As a youngster, it was always street playing like roller-skating, riding bikes, playing ball, jumping rope; all of which I enjoyed. And then in my teens, it was going to the movies, hanging out with my girl friends, and just having a good time with nothing.

**Did you have a job when you were young? How did you earn a living?**

I tried to get a job at Woolsworth’s 5 and Dime store when I was 14 years old. It only lasted a couple of days! During the summer when I was 16, I worked in a small office in a lumber mill. After graduating high school, I worked for Wolf Brother’s Company, a manufacturer of fancy paper bags and envelopes.

**Did you ever go on vacation?**

Vacations were very few, and if we ever went somewhere, it really wasn’t a “vacation.”

**Did your family have a car? When did you learn how to drive? How old were you when you had your first car?**

Ever since the late 1930’s, my father always had a car. There weren’t as many cars on the road as there is today. I learned to drive when I was 16, but never owned a car until well after I was married.

**What advice would you give to your younger self?**

I wish I was allowed to do more. I should have been more inquisitive and asked more questions.

**Who did you admire most when you were young?**

We didn’t think about those things in those days. I know that I have wonderful parents because they were good, honest people!

**When you were young, what did you hope to do when you grew up?**

I would tease my family that I would be a dancer or an actress. But truth be told, I really wanted to be married, have children, and be a homemaker.

**What are some important lessons you have learned in your life that you would pass on to today’s youth?**

Love and respect is the key. Have good manners, good friendships, be kind to yourself and other, don’t be greedy. Be patient, be tolerant, and remember that everything didn’t have to happen yesterday.

**Do you think that the changes that society has made since you were younger, with regard to technology and advancements, has made our world a better place?**

Progress has always been good and bad. Some of our technology is wonderful and some is absolutely terrible. Every generation has always reacted to new technology. If we don’t abuse these advancements, perhaps then our world could be a better place. We’ve been waiting for our to be a better place for eons and eons and eons!